The Eliza Armstrong Case

The British establishment have a long history of paedophilia in 1875 the age of sexual consent for females were raised from 12 years to 13. In 1885, after a great deal of campaigning from radical and religious groups was the age raised to 16.The publicity around the Elizabeth Armstrong case, where a 13-year-old was bought for five pounds, (equivalent of over £700 today) on the stipulation that she was a virgin. Josephine Butler and other campaigners had been exposing sex rings involving children the establishment answer was this was done by foreigners for foreigners,who were also blamed for the rise in sexually transmitted diseases the establishment view being that women of low moral character were to blame.This was challenged unsuccessfully by feminists who successfully saw the repeal of the contagious diseases acts 1886. Feminists and Social reformers had been arguing that the age of consent should be raised from 13. This was met with vociferous opposition, both from a House of Commons and LordsGiven that background the establishment was not well pleased when events around Elizabeth Armstrong were made public although the child sex trade was proven;those that brought it into the public domain had to be punished W.C. Stead, a pioneering investigating journalist and editor of the Pall Mall Gazette embarked on a campaign to expose child prostitution by publishing four articles entitled the Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon sections of the establishment criticised the articles citing them as sensational unproven journalism.To prove his case, Stead embarked with the help of social reformers, including members of the Salvation Army to go through the motions of purchasing a child,arranging for the purchase of 13-year-old Eliza Armstrong, which she revealed in the Gazette the articles had the desired effect there was public outrage. However the establishment prosecuted Stead under the charge of abduction he was found guilty and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment in the dock with Stead was Rebecca Jarrett Was a former sex worker, who had been rescued when near death by the Salvation Army She had been refuge in a safe house run by the Salvation Army in Whitechapel, she confided with Mrs. Bramwell Booth of her role in procuring children, she became a leading campaigner against child prostitution, who worked alongside Stead in exposing paedophiliain Victorian Britain . Rebecca was sentenced to six months hard Labour. The other defendant, French born Louise Mourey, a local midwife was found guilty and sentenced to 6 months hard Labour, she returned to her trade after serving her sentence. The court set up a fund for Eliza Armstrong, who was sent to a servant’s training school.

Being a Verbatim Report of the Proceedings at Bow-street

INTRODUCTION

The circumstances which have led to what is known as the Eliza Armstrong case have been told in all quarters of the globe, and in many languages. Daily news sheets are but ephemeral, and are flung aside when they have served their turn. It has been thought well, therefore, to bring together in pamphlet form the whole of the legal proceedings, so far as they have yet gone, in order that the public may have the whole of the evidence before them. The shorthand notes taken during the magisterial investigation at Bow-street are reproduced here, together with the suppressed speech of Mr. Stead, accompanied by numerous portraits of those concerned in the trial, and with illustrations of the various spots which have sprung from obscurity into notoriety. A chapter is devoted to each day's evidence. Before proceeding to the evidence a brief statement may be useful. On the 2nd of September last, that is, a month ago, Rebecca Jarrett, the woman described in the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" as "an old hand in the work of procuration," in the article "A Child of Thirteen Bought for £5" was charged at Bow-street police court before Mr. Vaughan with "several offences in connection with the Eliza Armstrong case." The charge-sheet set forth four distinct charges: — 1st (under 24 and 25 Vict., c. l00, s. 55), for unlawfully on the 3rd of June, 1885, and on divers days between that day and the 24th day of August, 1885, taking and causing to be taken one Eliza Armstrong, an unmarried girl under the age of sixteen — to wit, of the age of thirteen — out of the possession and against the will of Charles Armstrong, her father, and Elizabeth Armstrong, her mother, against the form of the statute in such a case made and provided; 2nd (24 and 25 Vic., c. 100, s. 56), for unlawfully and feloniously taking away and detaining Eliza Armstrong, a child under the age of fourteen, with intent to deprive her parents, Charles and Elizabeth Armstrong, of the possession of such child; 3rd, for indecently assaulting Eliza Armstrong and conspiring with one William Thomas Stead, and divers other persons to commit the said offence; 4th, for administering and causing to be administered to, and taken by, Eliza Armstrong, a certain noxious thing with intent to injure, aggrieve, and annoy her, and conspiring with William Thomas Stead and divers others to commit the said offence. At the same time Mr. Poland, instructed for the Treasury by Sir A. K. Stephenson, applied for summonses against Mr. W. T. Stead, the Chief Director of the Secret Commission, and editor of the Pall Mall Gazette; against Mr. Jacques, one of Mr. Stead's agents; Mrs. Combe, a lady employed by the Salvation Army, to whose house the child was taken on the morning of Thursday, June 4, and who, withThe prisoner Jarrett, carried her from London to the headquarters of the Salvation Army in Paris,where The child was kept for four weeks. Mr. Poland also asked for process against Mr. Bramwell Booth, chief of the staff of the Salvation Army, who was cognizant of what was done, and "was a party to the detaining of the child

for a long period from her parents," and also against Mdme. Louise Mourez, 3, Milton-street, Milton square, to whose house the child was taken for an examination on the 3rd of June. The charge is brought under the 56th section of the Offences to Person Act, which relates to the taking away of a child under the age of fourteen years and under Section 55, which relates to the abduction of an unmarried girl under the age of sixteen. And there is also a charge made under the 24th section with reference to the administering of any "noxious thing." Besides these there is a charge against Mdme. Mourez and the other defendants of indecently assaulting the said child, and a general charge including all these persons of conspiring to get possession of the child and taking her from her parents. As no warning had been given by the police officials these applications caused some little surprise. Mr. Stead was enjoying his holiday in Switzerland, but was communicated with at once, and telegraphed his immediate return in the following terms: —

[Grindelwald, Wednesday night, September 2] The arrest of Rebecca Jarrett is of a piece with the City Solicitor's prosecution of the newsboys. I alone am responsible. Rebecca Jarrett was only my unwilling agent. I am returning by the first express to claim the sole responsibility for the alleged abduction, and to demand, if condemned,the sole punishment. Meanwhile I am delighted at the opportunity thus afforded me of publicly vindicating the proceedings of the Secret Commission.

The great gravity of the issues to be decided, the position of the defendants, the peculiar circumstances of the prosecution, the burning desire in so many quarters to see the truth of "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" shaken, each and all helped to make the case a cause célèbre in the annals of criminal trials. Of course on the 2nd, when Jarrett was first placed in the dock at the Bow-street police-court, only the initiated few knew what was coming. But the alleged abduction had been in every one's mouth for days before, and it only wanted the publicity of the police-court, and the lengthy reports of the press, to make it the subject of common conversation in all sections of the community. Early on Monday morning, the 7th of September, the day appointed for the first hearing of the case, a large crowd had assembled in Bow-street to catch a glimpse of any one who was to take a part in the trial. By half-past ten the large court was what an impartial critic would call "filled to its utmost capacity." No such thing. If there is one room in the world which has elastic properties it is a police-court on the day of an important trial. They came, and still they came, counsel and counsels' clerks, solicitors and solicitors' clerks, artists, reporters, and messengers forming the legitimate members of the audience to whom every one gives way by right. What may be termed in distinction the illegitimate crowd unfortunately comes too, and pushes and bribes its way in, until the whole is a mass of human beings wedged in almost inextricably. Seats were always found for a number of ladies interested in the case, among them being, Mrs. Josephine

Butler, Mrs. Stead, and Mrs. Bramwell Booth, who formed one group. And this scene was repeated day after day while the trial lasted. Always the same crowd, inside and without, and always the formidable array of counsel. Here we may say that Mr. Poland appeared for the Public Prosecutor, instructed by Sir A. K. Stephenson, representing the Treasury; Mr.Charles Russell, Q.C., M.P., was for Mrs. Jarrett; Mr. Vaughan Williams for. Mr.Sampson Jacques; Mr. Waddy, Q.C., M.P., and Mr. Sutherst for Mr. Bramwell Boothand Mdme. Combe, and Mr. Overend for Mdme. Mourez; while Mr. W. T. Stead conducted his own defence, advised by Mr. Lickfold, in the absence from England of Mr. George Lewis of Messrs. Lewis and Lewis. The proceedings on the first day, the 2nd September, when Jarrett alone was in the dock, were only formal. On the second day, when the summonses against the other defendants were returnable, Mr. Stead, Mr. Bramwell Booth, Mr. Jacques, Mdme. Combe, Mdme. Mourez were ushered in Indian file into the narrow slip before the dock and fronted the bench. Rebecca Jarrett, walking in between two gaolers, took her place in the dock to a humming but ungrammatical chorus of "that's her." She was clad in a brown ulster and dark and umbrageous straw hat. Jarrett is a woman of about forty years of age, tall, and of commanding presence, with large features and of rather sallow complexion. The day was chiefly occupied by Mr. Poland's opening, but the monotony of the proceedings was broken by the call for Eliza Armstrong. The child, dressed in the greyish brown cape which Jarrett had bought her, and a large strawDuchess of Devonshire hat, heavily trimmed, a woollen comforter encircling her neck, stepped into the box. But before Mr. Poland's examination had proceeded very far, it was found impossible to hear her responses, so she was accommodated with a chair in the well, upon which she sat and fronted counsel and reporters, and her old friend Jarrett. The child's cross-examination was postponed, and Mrs. Armstrong was called, and after a considerable delay, stood up in the witness box a woman with a bold face, of somewhat Calmuck caste, wearing a shabby bonnet with a grey shawl thrown over her shoulders. She was a ready witness enough, and answered her questions promptly and with considerable temper. The third day's proceedings were occupied with some further examination in chief of this witness, and Eliza was then recalled to be cross examined by Mr. Charles Russell. He dealt, as he had hinted the day before, "in no hostile spirit" with the "child." His forms of address varied; sometimes it was “Miss Armstrong," generally "child." Once or twice he was severe; but generally he addressed Eliza with gentleness and urbanity. At a quarter past four Mrs. Armstrong reappeared in the witness-box, and stood face to face with Mr. Russell, and then came the real tug of war. The witness at once put her arms akimbo, and defiantly shouted, "You are not going to baffle me! You are not going to cross examine me as you have done my child!" Sensation in court. Mr. Poland and Mr. Vaughan endeavoured to pacify the witness a course, however, which Mr. Russell deprecated. "We had better," he said, "hear Mrs. Armstrong in her own way." The storm died away for a few minutes, but

throughout the afternoon one squall after another swept over the court, the disturbance being greatest when Mr. Russell questioned her as to character. She had been fined five times in all —thrice for drunkenness, once for assault, and once for obscene language. "I swear a good deal," she even remarked in a fit of candour. On the next day (Saturday, September 12) of the hearing Mrs. Armstrong was recalled for further cross-examination, and seemed to have profited by the delay to recover her temper. There were indeed some little breezes between her and Mr. Russell, but they were breezes and nothing more. What she complained of most was that Mr. Russell had "such a way of looking at her." Indeed, the most serious storms during the day were between the counsel for the defence on the one side and the magistrate and Mr. Poland on the other. Both Mr. Russell and Mr. Waddy complained of unnecessary interruptions on Mr. Poland's part, and both of them were at different times pulled up by the magistrate, who required the drift of their cross-examination to be fully pointed out to him. After Mr. Russell, however, came Mr. Waddy, whose inflections of voice — cynical, sarcastic, contemptuous, or indignant, as occasion required — did not seem to please the witness. Some curious facts were elicited as to the various gentlemen who had interested themselves in the mother's behalf. There was first of all "a little short man" from Lloyd's Newspaper; then there was "a gentleman from the St. James's Gazette" who had devised the despatch of the letter to Mr. Booth which Mrs. Armstrong recited from memory in court; and last of all there was Mr. Thomas, who had helped her to recover her child, and had paid her some 15s. in all for "her trouble " in so doing. Mrs. Broughton, who was next examined, was what is known as a "saucy" witness — a character which was well set off by a saucy new bonnet, of the brightest purple. She had a decidedly picturesque tongue, too, and her descriptions of her domestic interior were evidently true to the life: "Why, 'tis Becky, to be sure," says I. "Yes, good morning, Nancy," says she. "Nancy," says she to me, "I'm a-going to stop to dinner, Nancy." "Very well, Becky," says I; "there's bacon in the cupboard; there's potatoes in the pot, and money in the cup." Her version of the transaction when she settled down to business was, as the magistrate was at one point understood to remark, "a different story altogether." Broughton's cross-examination was chiefly directed to elucidating her own antecedents and her correspondence with Jarrett. The prosecution had put in a series of letters from Mrs. Jarratt to Mrs. Broughton. Mr. Waddy thereupon produced a letter which he asserted had been sent by Mrs. Broughton in answer to Mrs. Jarrett. In order to establish his point, he read one of Mrs. Jarrett's letters, and pointed out in detail the passages to which the alleged letter of Mrs. Broughton seemed directly to refer. Mr. Vaughan once or twice interposed, but on Mr. Waddy explaining to him the drift of the proceeding, he allowed the examination to go on. Mrs. Broughton, however, disclaimed all responsibility for the alleged answer: "I will speak to the letters I have received,"she exclaimed,” but not to any of those false ones, which, indeed, she "would have been ashamed to have had anything to do with." Mrs.

Broughton, it should be explained, is "no scholard," and does not read; or write. She "only wished she did," and it was to this incapacity on her part that she ascribed the want of accurate recollection of which Mr. Waddy complained. The struggle on this point was long and severe, and Mr. Waddy at length resumed his seat, remarking significantly that "there was a point beyond which it was useless to go." Monday (September 14) was the fifth day, when the proceedings began with Mrs. Broughton's cross-examination by Mr. Stead, his first appearance in that capacity. The proceedings were somewhat delayed at the out-set by the distinction which the magistrate drew, but which the lay mind of Mr. Stead was slow in catching, between character and credit. "The character of the witness," said Mr. Vaughan, "has nothing to do with the case." "But suppose," urged Mr. Stead, "she is a liar; would that be immaterial?" That, Mr. Vaughan replied, would be a question of credit, and "another matter" altogether. With this judicial compromise thus happily arranged, Mr. Stead soon warmed to his work. The witness appeared more afraid of the amateur counsel than of the professional, pausing to think of her replies, and turning away from the penetrating eye of the Chief Director. The girl Jane Farrer was next called. It was she who was declared by Rebecca to be "too big and too old," though in truth, as she admitted smilingly, she is but an inch or two "bigger than Eliza," but the age was the drawback. Jane answered her questions trippingly, and was an admirable type of the willing witness, with one exception. Her natural delicacy and modesty — she does not live in Charles-street — made her hesitate to define the mysterious initials B — C —, a wrathful epithet applied by Mrs. Armstrong to Mrs. Broughton. There was some discussion on its interpretation, until Mr. Vaughan, nodding his head sagely, declared the phrase to be "an opprobrious name." After Farrer came Stevens, another of the girls who had been called in to see Jarrett, but had not been chosen. The object of their evidence was to corroborate so far as the occurrences came within their knowledge the accounts given either by Mrs. Broughton or Mrs. Armstrong of the negotiations for Eliza, and Farrer, it now appears, was opportunely present the whole time. Charles Armstrong, the father, who was the next witness, was once a militiaman, and is still a martinet. What did hedo when he heard his wife had let Eliza go? Why, he just "knocked her down, and the next time see her was when I heard she was locked up." He is a hard-working man, too, and he referred almost plaintively to the necessity of correcting his wife. "Did I strike her? Oh, yes; I struck her; I cut her mouth for her" — it is all in the day's work, he seemed to mean. Inspector Borner, who was next examined in chief, was shedding floods of invisible tears, to judge by his lachrymose tones and mournful countenance. His examination lasted till half-past five o'clock, and by mutual arrangement between the counsel and magistrate, the case was adjourned till ten o'clock on Saturday, September 26. Four full days had now been occupied with hearing all that the Treasury had to allege against the defendants; the last day (Saturday, September 26) was devoted to their defence, and was chiefly taken up with the magistrate's altercation with Mr. Stead

and determination to suppress his statement. The scene between the magistrate and the defendant was a very lively, not to say ludicrous one, as will be seen by reference to the report of the proceedings. "You are the editor of a newspaper," said Mr. Vaughan," and you may publish the whole statement which you propose to make here." The suppressed portion of Mr. Stead's speech is here republished. The generally expected conclusion of the whole matter then followed by Mr. Vaughan committing all the defendants for trial, except that Mr. Booth and Mdme. Combe were relieved of all complicity in the indecent assault. It was very notable and a subject of general comment on this, the last day of the Bow-street investigations, that the obscene and raging mob which had hitherto been allowed to obstruct the road, and whose violence had every evening rendered it necessary to spirit the defendants off in a prison van, familiarly called "Black Maria," had vanished. Thousands had been reduced to a few scores, and this handful was quiet and sympathetic. This healthy change was partly the result of the admirable arrangements of Superintendent Thompson of Bow-street, who had been holiday-making during the trial, and had returned opportunely to carry out this much-needed protective reform, and partly owing to the natural subsidence of hostility consequent on the discovery by the public of the real nature of the prosecution.

Pall Mall Gazette Supplement
October 3, 1885
The Trial
Mr. Justice Henry Charles Lopes' Sentence
The Old Bailey (November 10, 1885)

William Thomas Stead, it will be convenient that I should deal with your case first. You have been found guilty fewer than two indictments — the one charging you with the abduction of Eliza Armstrong, the other charging you with indecent assault. Now I am prepared to give you credit for good motives from your point of view, but, at the same time, I cannot disguise from my mind that you have acted throughout recklessly and against the advice of all those whom you thought fit to consult. Believing in the existence of most horrible depravity, it appears to me that you made statements about it which, when challenged, you were unable to verify. You then determined to verify the truth of your assertions by an experiment with a child who was to be bought and subjected to all that a

real victim would have been, but was to be rescued before any harm was done. For that purpose you selected a person of alleged reformed character, but who to your knowledge had passed a life — an infamous life, as I may say — pandering to and encouraging the very sins which you say — and I believe you — you were so anxious to repress. You chose your own agent, and, as might have been anticipated, having regard to her antecedents, which you fully knew, that agent deceived you. The jury have so found, and so I believe. The result is that your experiment, instead of proving what it was intended to prove, has absolutely and entirely failed, for the jury have found that Eliza Armstrong, the subject of that experiment, was never bought for immoral purposes at all. I regret to say that you thought fit to publish in the Pall Mall Gazette a distorted account of the case of Eliza Armstrong, and that you deluged, some months ago, our-streets and the whole country with an amount of filth which has, as I fear, tainted the minds of the children that you were so anxious to protect, and which has been — and I don't hesitate to say, ever will be — a disgrace to journalism. An irreparable injury has been done to the parents of this child, and they have been subjected to the unutterable scandal and ignominy of having sold their child for violation. The child has been dragged through the dirt, examined by a woman who bears, or, in your opinion, at any rate, bore a foul character, subjected to chloroform, taken to a brothel, and then sent to the South of France, her letters to her mother suppressed, and the child refused when demanded. All that has been done by you, relying on the statements of a woman whose character you knew and whom you trusted with money — and I think this no small part of the offence you committed — to bribe parents to commit the greatest sin they could commit — viz. to sell their own children for immoral purposes. Well, I feel that I cannot and ought not to punish you as I would punish a person who had been found guilty of abduction, and who had been actuated by sordid and sinful motives. I am going to give credit to any good motives as far as I possibly can; I am going to give effect to the recommendation of the jury which they made on Saturday night, but I cannot forget that you are an educated man, who should have known that the law cannot be broken to promote any supposed good, and that the sanctity of private life cannot be invaded for the furtherance of the views of an individual who, I am inclined to believe, thought that the end would sanctify the means. Now in these circumstances, I need not say that I have given the most intense and anxious consideration to your case, and I have come to the conclusion that I cannot pass anything but a substantial sentence, and that is that you be imprisoned without hard labour for three calendar months. I now come to the case of Rebecca Jarrett, and there is no doubt a mitigating circumstance in your case, but there is also an aggravating circumstance. The mitigating circumstance is that you only undertook what you did under extreme pressure, but the aggravating circumstance is that, after a most patient hearing, and having regard to the finding of the jury, I am firmly convinced you misled your employer, Stead. In these circumstances, the sentence I pass on you is that you be imprisoned

without hard labour for six calendar months. I now deal, Jacques, with your case. You have not been found guilty of the charge of abduction, and I fully agree with the verdict the jury found in that case, because we must look at it only by the light of evidence, and I do not think, on the evidence, that you knew or had reasonable means of knowing that the child had not been taken with the consent of the parents. You have only been found guilty of indecent assault,and the sentence on you is one month's imprisonment without hard labour.

The "Maiden Tribute" campaign was the high point in Stead's career in daily journalism.

The series inspired George Bernard Shaw to write Pygmalion, and to name his lead character Eliza. Another of the characters described, the "Minotaur of London", is reckoned to have inspired Jekyll and Hyde.